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LAWMAKERS ASSAIL C.I.A. ON DEFECTOR

An 'Awful Lot' of Very Angry
Senators, Vermonter Says
— Some Less Alarmed

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 5 — Several lawmakers harshly criticized the Central Intelligence Agency today for its handling of Vitaly Yurchenko, the senior Russian intelligence official who defected to the West last summer and announced on Monday that he was returning to the Soviet Union.

"There are an awful lot of very angry senators on this matter in both parties, and rightly so," said Senator Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee. "You assume the C.I.A. is trained professionals, that they know what they're doing. That assumption is now being questioned."

Some legislators raised the possibility that Mr. Yurchenko had been a double agent, planted by Soviet intelligence to embarrass the Reagan Administration on the eve of Mr. Reagan's summit meeting with Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, in Geneva later this month.

Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, who heads the Intelligence Committee, said that long before word of Mr. Yurchenko's defection had been published, members of his panel had been privately raising "tough questions" with William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, about the Soviet agent's motives and authenticity.

"Senators said, 'Hey, wait a minute, this is too good to be true,'" Mr. Durenberger said. "Everybody had a gnawing sense. It's not every day you get a No. 1 catch."

"Bill's reaction was, 'We thought of that,'" Mr. Durenberger said. "But you can never tell with Bill Casey. He really did want to believe that he had a prize. How much that colored his judgment we still really don't know yet."

After a briefing tonight from intelligence officials, Mr. Leahy told reporters: "My pessimistic feeling is that we have an agent that was foisted on us. The C.I.A., I'm sure, feels strongly that we have a defector who changed his mind."

Other lawmakers were less alarmed about Mr. Yurchenko's decision to abandon the United States and focused on the information he has presumably supplied since his defection.

"We got three good months out of this fellow," said Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York.

He called the double-agent theory "bizarre" and said Mr. Yurchenko was too prominent in the Soviet intelligence agency to be used as "bait."

"He was too good to be faked," Mr. Moynihan said.